

Filed for intro on 01/20/2000

SENATE BILL 2813

By Ramsey

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 3, Chapter 15, relative to the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood. This act appropriates a sum certain to implement the provisions of the act in fiscal year 2000-2001.

WHEREAS, the general assembly recognizes the detrimental effect of fatherlessness on children. Fatherless children experience significantly higher instances of poverty, psychological problems, criminal activity, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, suicide, school drop-out, and teenage pregnancy; and

WHEREAS, the pervasive nature of these significant problems attributed directly to father absence creates incentive to address this issue; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood shall be to raise awareness of the problems created when a child grows up without the presence of a responsible father, to identify obstacles that impede or prevent the involvement of responsible fathers in the lives of their children, and to identify strategies that are successful in encouraging responsible fatherhood; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 3, Chapter 15, is amended by adding Sections 2 through 9 as a new Part.

SECTION 2.

(a)(1) There is hereby created, within the legislative department, the commission on responsible fatherhood. The commission shall consist of twelve (12) members. Three (3) senators shall be appointed by the speaker of the senate, at least one (1) of whom shall be appointed from the membership of the Select Committee on Children and Youth and the Senate Judiciary Committee. Three (3) citizen members, who are knowledgeable on fatherhood and family matters, shall be appointed by the speaker of the senate. One (1) such citizen member shall reside in each of the state's three (3) grand divisions. Three (3) representatives shall be appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives, at least one (1) of whom shall be appointed from the membership of each of the following standing committees of the House: Child and Family and Judiciary. Three (3) citizen members, who are knowledgeable on fatherhood and family matters, shall be appointed by the speaker of the house. Three (3) citizen members shall be appointed by the governor. One (1) such citizen member shall be from each of the following: the faith community, a primary residential parent advocacy group, and a nonresidential parent advocacy group. One (1) representative of the department of children's services shall be appointed by the commissioner; one (1) representative of the department of human services shall be appointed by the commissioner; and one (1) judge from the pilot mediation program shall be appointed by the director of the Administrative Office of the Courts. One (1) seat is to be held by the executive director of the Select Committee on Children and Youth. Appointments to the commission shall be made within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this legislation.

(2) Each legislative member appointed to the commission shall continue to serve on the commission for the duration of the commission's existence for as long as such

member continues to serve as a member of the general assembly. Any vacancies occurring on the commission shall be filled subject to the guidelines established in this subsection.

(b)(1) The commission shall meet within thirty (30) days of the appointments and at least quarterly and at the call of the chair. Legislative members of the commission shall be entitled to reimbursement for their expenses in attending meetings of the commission or any subcommittee thereof at the same rates and in the same manner as when attending the general assembly. Citizen members of the commission shall receive no salary but shall be eligible to receive reimbursement for actual and necessary travel expenses incurred while performing commission business. Such reimbursement shall be paid in accordance with the comprehensive travel regulations promulgated by the commissioner of finance and administration and approved by the attorney general and reporter.

(2) The committee shall elect from its membership a chair, a vice chair, and such other officers as it deems necessary.

SECTION 3. The commission on responsible fatherhood is authorized to:

- (1) Create subcommittees related to its purposes;
- (2) Request standing committees of the general assembly, the fiscal review committee, and any agencies or entities of state government to study and report on designated policy matters relating to fatherhood issues;
- (3) Conduct such meetings and public hearings in Nashville and across the state as shall be necessary;
- (4) Employ commission staff, subject to the availability of funding for such purpose and subject to approval by both speakers;
- (5) Enter into contracts for technical or professional services, subject to the availability of funding for such purpose and subject to approval by both speakers; and

(6) Perform such other duties as are required by the provisions of this part or as may be requested by joint resolution of the general assembly.

SECTION 4. The commission on responsible fatherhood shall publish an annual report by February 1 of each year which summarizes the committee's activities, findings, recommendations, proposals, and expenditure of funds. A copy of the annual report shall be distributed to each member of the general assembly.

SECTION 5. It is the duty of the commission on responsible fatherhood to:

(1) Review current state policies on fatherhood as reflected by Tennessee statutes, regulations, programs, services and budgetary priorities;

(2) Study the many problems which jeopardize the father-child bond, including, but not limited to, such persistent, interdisciplinary problems as historically low expectations held of fathers, fathers who are absent from the home and voluntarily do not participate in their children's' lives, fathers who have been involuntarily obstructed from participating in the lives of their children, fathers who are present in the home but who are disengaged from their children's lives, and the problems experienced by children as a result of father absence, such as poverty, psychological problems, criminal activity, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, suicide, school drop-out, and teenage pregnancy;

(3) Define and establish the components, guidelines and objectives of a comprehensive state policy to ensure and promote the present and future of the child-father bond;

(4) Identify any Tennessee laws, regulations, programs, services and budgetary priorities which conflict with the components, guidelines and objectives of such comprehensive policy;

(5) Search for any interdepartmental gaps, inconsistencies and inefficiencies in the implementation or attainment of such comprehensive policy;

(6) Identify any new laws, regulations, programs, services and budgetary priorities which are needed to ensure and promote the present and future health of the child-father bond;

(7) Serve as an in-house informational resource for the general assembly on legislative policy matters concerning fatherhood issues; and

(8) Perform such other activities as are reasonably related to the legislative intent of this part, including, but not necessarily limited to, improving public awareness of problems caused by father absence.

SECTION 6. The Commission on Responsible Fatherhood shall be guided by the following principles:

(1) The areas where responsible fathering appear to break down should be addressed. Men should be encouraged to be responsible fathers and to be full partners in parenting their children;

(2) Peer support networks for fathers are an essential part of any successful strategy to connect or reconnect responsible fathers to their children;

(3) Women have a crucial role in promoting and supporting the involvement of responsible fathers in the lives of their children, and that role must not be overlooked or diminished;

(4) Family violence must not be tolerated; and

(5) Special attention should be focused on educating males and females prior to parenthood regarding responsible parenting, particularly the important role fathers play.

SECTION 7. There is hereby appropriated the sum of fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) to fund the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood in fiscal year 2000-2001.

SECTION 8. Upon completion of the duties assigned by this part, the commission on responsible fatherhood shall prepare and publish a final report. The committee shall distribute the final report to each member of the general assembly and shall cease to exist. The

committee shall complete such assigned duties as soon as reasonably practicable, but no later than February 1, 2006.

SECTION 9. The commission on responsible fatherhood shall have the authority to apply for grants, including federal grants, and accept private contributions.

SECTION 10. This Act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.